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ABSTRACT

England's Learning and Skills Development Agency welcomes the introduction of a coherent national funding and delivery strategy for adult literacy, numeracy, and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). The agency believes that the strategy should incorporate the lessons of previous literacy and numeracy initiatives and build on examples of good practice across the post-16 sector, including work-based, community-based, and further education college-based provision. It is also the agency's hope that literacy and numeracy students be approached as adult customers and that funding streams for basic skills be harmonized. The agency has 96 specific recommendations concerning the following areas: (1) challenges facing literacy, numeracy, and ESOL education; (2) motivation and participation; (3) infrastructure for delivery; (4) new targets and resources; (5) priority groups; (6) building a firm foundation (management, teaching staff, initial assessment, accommodation); (6) management of learning (learning programs, certification for bite-sized achievement, progression); (7) national tests; (8) national curriculum; (9) key skills and basic skills; (10) new teaching materials; (11) inspection; (11) pathfinder projects; (12) flexible learning and information and communications technology; and (13) next steps. (Specific agency recommendations regarding staff training, priority groups, and

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non-schedule 2 evaluations are appended. Twenty-five endnotes are included.)
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learning
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the agency responds

Skills for life

Statement on the national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills

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Executive summary

1. The learning and Skills Development Agency welcomes the introduction of a coherent national funding and delivery strategy for adult literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). We also welcome the opportunity to comment on this strategy statement. We believe that wide consultation will lead to fuller debate and create better ownership of the strategy, enabling shared understanding and more effective implementation.

2. We believe that the strategy should take on board the lessons of previous literacy and numeracy initiatives and build on examples of good practice across the post-16 sector, including work-, community- and college-based provision.

3. We recommend that the Unit produces separate strategy statements addressing the specific needs of those people who do not speak English as their first language or who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

4. We hope that the strategy approaches literacy and numeracy students as adult customers rather than as victims of their particular circumstances. It will be vital to consult with potential learners to identify their perceptions of the skills they need and the skills they wish to develop to meet their aims in their personal and working lives. We need robust research evidence on adult motivation and participation.

5. A major programme of awareness raising should be undertaken immediately to prepare the ground for future promotional campaigns.

6. The strategy statement is entitled *Skills for life*. If the strategy is to achieve its targets, it is essential that literacy and numeracy are embedded in the vocational and self-development programmes that motivate adults. This approach will also enable learners to develop the wider range of lifelong learning skills implied by the title of this statement. Discrete basic skills programmes are unlikely to attract learners in large numbers.

7. There is a danger that the basic skills strategy could be compromised by upward drift. Targets should be formulated to discourage providers from picking off learners with 'borderline' basic skills weaknesses to the exclusion of more difficult-to-reach learners who take longer to achieve.

8. We agree that the *promotional* and *intragovernmental* strategy should address priority groups but suggest that the delivery strategy should take an inclusive approach. Additional priority groups should emerge from the regional plans for basic skills.

9. National tests may be off-putting for many potential students. We believe it is essential that alternative ways of recognising bite-sized achievement are available.

10. The Unit should take steps to ensure that basic skills provision is managed effectively by providers and given the status enjoyed by other areas of the curriculum.

11. We have a shortage of teachers, support workers, learning assistants and mentors in basic skills. The strategy should build capacity by creating opportunities for local people, including those in the workplace, to train for these roles and become instrumental in the development of their own communities.

12. If employers and employees are to be encouraged to take part in learning, the provision needs to be relevant and motivating. A focus on the particular basic skills needs of individuals in the workplace may secure active involvement in learning. Attempts to manipulate the learning programme to secure a fit with a national curriculum for basic skills could reduce relevance and motivation. Programmes and materials need to reflect the particular needs of individuals in the workplace, rather than offer more of the same types of activities that have been tried and have failed before.

13. Successful basic skills work in the workplace and the community takes time. Effective short-term projects rely on partnership-building, outreach, staff expertise and good quality assurance systems. It is wasteful if successful projects are discontinued or suffer a funding hiatus.

14. Funding streams for basic skills should be harmonised and information about funding made more accessible. Funding influences quality. Some successful providers have had repeated success in bidding for development and initiative funding while others have had none. As a result, capability and capacity across the country are not even.

15. To judge the success of the national strategy in achieving targets, greater clarity is required concerning the baseline targets and measures of achievement that will be used. Careful definition of baselines and measures will be essential to secure appropriate incentives to providers.

Detailed response

This response draws on the expertise of the Learning and Skills Development Agency staff and on the contributions of expert practitioners at a consultation seminar held to discuss the strategy on 8 January 2001.

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The challenge

1. Although there clearly are significant negative economic and social implications for those with poor basic skills, paragraphs 1–7 of the document reinforce the stereotype that people with literacy and numeracy weaknesses are totally inadequate in all aspects of their lives. Potential students are unlikely to identify with the descriptions in the statement.

2. The section implies that people with literacy and numeracy needs are passive receivers of education. In reality, they are more likely to see themselves as customers of the education system. As *The new learning market*[1] suggests: 'The focus in implementing the learning and skills proposals should be on supporting the learner to be an informed and influential customer and on ensuring the system has the capacity to deliver the outcomes that the learners require.'

3. Paragraph 7 makes statements regarding the quality of basic skills provision to date. It would be helpful if the definitive strategy document acknowledged that adequate inspection evidence is not available for basic skills provision delivered by LEAs, voluntary organisations and private training providers.

4. During the year 1999/2000, FEFC inspectors observed 644 literacy and numeracy lessons as part of the new inspection arrangements for basic skills: 49 per cent of these lessons were graded good or outstanding.[2] There is current good practice in basic skills teaching. This good practice needs to be consolidated, shared and built upon.

Motivation and participation

5. We agree with the Secretary of State's statement in the foreword to the strategy document that:

   > *... many of our greatest advances in adult and community education have been achieved because learning was deeply valued by ordinary people who supported each other in their efforts to improve themselves. This culture of a commitment to learning is a tradition which we must rediscover and renew today.*

6. This culture change will rely on a voluntary, rather than coercive or prescriptive approach.

7. The strategy statement reports that the pattern for adult participation is that 'those who receive continuing education are those who are already qualified'. The Unit needs to address the issue of adult motivation and participation if the strategy is to be successful.

8. One of the keys to motivation and participation in education is the nature of the provision on offer. A recent Agency report,[3] commissioned by the DfEE in response to a recommendation in the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) report *Bridging the gap: new opportunities for 16–18 year olds in education, employment or training*, developed a set of six key principles for effective working with disadvantaged young people. The report notes that the second of the six principles, 'programmes and interventions that motivate, engage and encourage progression', was regarded by the case study schemes as absolutely central to success. This recommendation tallies with the finding of the recent non-schedule 2 evaluation[4] which reported that one of the essential ingredients for an effective project was 'imagination and creativity in curriculum design and delivery'.

9. We agree with the Basic Skills Agency (BSA)[5] that 'reforming structures will not motivate the millions of adults who need to strengthen their literacy and numeracy skills', and that the media should be strongly encouraged to play a leading role in motivating adults to improve their basic skills.

10. We also suggest that the need for consultation and research in this area is paramount. At a recent FEDA conference, the Secretary of State suggested that research and development work priorities in the post-16 sector include work to investigate 'stimulating demand and, thereby, post-16 participation; what motivates learners and how providers should respond'. We hope that the strategy will draw on the findings of the recent Gallup survey and also commission complementary research as necessary, perhaps as an element within the new Pathfinder projects. This work should involve consultation with non-learners as well as those already participating in education or training.

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Infrastructure for delivery

11. We welcome the setting up of the new Basic Skills Strategy Unit and the opportunity it gives to develop coherent intragovernmental policy in the area of basic skills.

12. Providers have particularly welcomed recent letters issued by the Unit which have given an overview of all relevant basic skills initiatives.

13. We agree that the local learning and skills councils (LSCs) will play a vital role in the planning and funding of basic skills at a regional level. We welcome the appointment of dedicated basic skills staff within local LSCs. However, the statement does not mention other key players such as the local learning partnerships (LLPs), the regional development agencies (RDAs) and the local government offices. It is vital that basic skills plans relate to the skills development plans and skills development funds of the RDAs. A significant proportion of current basic skills provision is also made through single regeneration budget (SRB) funding administered at regional level. We need to build coherent planning processes at regional and subregional levels.

14. The statement suggests that funding 'will be directed to education providers who are successful in raising standards of achievement, and away from those who are failing to do so'. There are dangers in tying funding to learner achievement alone. If funding incentives are based mainly on achievement, providers may pick off learners who are likely to achieve easily and exclude the more difficult-to-reach learners who will take longer to achieve. We suggest that judgements about provider performance need to take learner starting points and local circumstances into account. The emphasis on performance raises other worries. How long will providers have to prove themselves? What support will be provided to weaker providers?

15. The collection of management information and other data has been a problem for many smaller basic skills providers. This problem should be resolved in liaison with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC).

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New targets and resources

16. The Agency welcomes the use of the specific terms 'adult literacy' and 'adult numeracy' in the document as opposed to 'basic skills' which is often perceived as a vague and pejorative label.

17. There is very little mention of provision for people who do not have English as their first language or who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. We suggest that there need to be separate strategy documents for these areas of work.

18. We assume that the improvement target will be made more specific in due course. The current wording, 'reduce by 750,000 the number of adults who have difficulty with literacy and numeracy by 2004', is vague. Will all learners, including those with learning difficulties, be included in the base-line assessment? Will improvement at the whole range of levels count? Will the target require improvement in all the subskills, or might learners focus on their oral skills and still count? What type of assessment instrument will be used for the purpose of base-line and subsequent assessment of skills?

19. We welcome the recognition in the foreword that inadequate public funding has contributed to the failure to make a sufficient impact on levels of literacy and numeracy.

20. The SEU report *Bridging the gap* pointed out that many of the most effective education schemes currently operate outside the mainstream and rely on bids for short-term funding. However, building capacity and developing trust take time and require longer-term funding. Short-term projects can be wasted if successful outreach, partnerships and staff expertise are not consolidated via continuation funding. It is not surprising, therefore, that the negative effects of working in an unstable funding environment emerge as a critical issue in case studies.

21. The fifth principle identified by *Back on track: successful learning provision for disaffected young people*[6] was that the characteristics of good funding practice include:

    - core funding
    - sufficient funding to cover all essential programme elements
    - funding that sustains a programme of appropriate length
    - funding that allows the scheme to be sustainable in the long term.

22. The new resources for adult literacy and numeracy are welcome. We urge the Unit to help promote the introduction of stable funding streams for basic skills to eradicate some of the wastage and short-termism of innovative funding initiatives to date.

23. Basic education departments delivering literacy, numeracy and ESOL provision have received adequate funding under the FEFC funding methodology. However, these same departments have not always reaped the benefit of the units they have earned. In some cases they have suffered from significant under-investment. We recommend that the new LSC funding methodology is designed to ensure that this cannot happen in the future.

24. We agree that funding must be used to greatest effect. However, as we describe above, care must be taken to ensure that the measures of effectiveness are appropriate and that providers, particularly those working with the most difficult-to-engage adults, are not penalised by measurements of achievement that are unsuited to their target groups.

25. We believe that the option for funding non-accredited learning programmes should remain, providing learning goals are set within the new basic skills standards.

26. We hope that the Unit will work with the LSC to ensure that funding is available for short, bite-sized programmes, as introduced this year by the FEFC.

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Priority groups

27. The statement asks whether some groups have been omitted from the list of priority groups. Specific groups not mentioned include travellers, learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, army recruits, people recovering from drug/alcohol dependency, ex-offenders, carers at home, women in refuge and hostel accommodation, care leavers, long-term unemployed and people with mental health difficulties.

28. We agree that the promotional and intra-governmental strategy needs to address the needs of priority groups to raise awareness and introduce policy changes. However, we suggest that the delivery strategy should take an inclusive approach. Additional priority groups should emerge from the regional plans for basic skills.

29. We also suggest that potential learners will not necessarily see themselves in terms of the priority groups described in the strategy statement. They may be reached through a publicity or marketing exercise designed for their priority group, for example a support worker addressing a group of young mothers on a council estate. However, this does not necessarily mean that the most appropriate provision is a course designed for young mothers. They will be individuals with a range of different skills, needs and interests. Their 'disadvantage' may not be a common denominator.

30. So, while we recognise the need to identify approaches that will engage members of these groups, we are concerned that a focus on delivering to priority groups will be detrimental to the success of the strategy. We believe that such a focus:
    - will not be sufficiently radical to meet the challenge of encouraging 7m adults to improve their skills in literacy and numeracy
    - places emphasis on supply rather than demand
    - presents a deficit model of literacy and numeracy
    - could limit choice for the learner.

31. Broadly, we believe the strategy needs to:
    - ensure that projects aiming to build capacity within communities have sufficient time to develop trust, identify local needs, design relevant provision and deliver it over a reasonable period
    - develop approaches which build capacity by involving members of communities who would otherwise not take up formal learning opportunities; we urgently need to train teachers, support workers, learning assistants and mentors from the 'priority groups' who will themselves become actively involved in the drive to improve basic skills
    - design programmes that integrate literacy, numeracy and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) into activities to motivate otherwise reluctant learners.

32. Tests could have an especially damaging effect on motivation and confidence among many members of these priority groups.

33. We make specific suggestions for involving the priority groups in Appendix B. Appendix C identifies relevant messages from the evaluation of the non-schedule 2 pilot projects.[4]

Building a firm foundation

Management

34. Basic skills provision needs to be seen as a priority by senior managers in the post-16 sector. An FEFC report, for example, acknowledges that 'strategic management for basic education is generally weak',[7] that 'many colleges change programme little from year to year' and 'take little account of market research'. Many departments have too few posts overall or too many part-time posts, making the provision difficult to manage effectively. Middle managers are expected to carry many responsibilities and are often untrained for their role.

35. However, the same survey reports that 'where senior managers are directly involved in – and knowledgeable about – the planning and development of the programme area, provision is invariably good'. We welcome the FEFC's Basic Skills Quality Initiative which offers providers the opportunity to focus on the strategic and operational management of basic skills. The new strategy needs to ensure that all senior managers take this area of work seriously.

Teaching staff

36. The skills of the staff who deliver training in literacy, numeracy and ESOL are crucial to the success of the strategy. Paragraph 49 acknowledges that a key feature of the strategy will be teachers 'competent to provide alternative learning techniques, including interactive learning with groups and individuals, face to face and on-line'. The sector is struggling to find sufficient trained teachers, particularly those with numeracy and ICT skills, to deal with *current* student numbers. We are concerned that the statement places insufficient emphasis on the need to recruit and train large numbers of new teachers. This aspect of the infrastructure needs to be an absolute priority if we are to meet the target of 750,000 learners by 2004.

37. It takes approximately two years for a teacher to attain the skills described in paragraph 49, which means that awareness raising and recruitment should start now to deliver the level of learner improvement required by 2004. In our view, the teacher training milestones are unrealistic given the large numbers of new people required.

38. There is an urgent need to develop suitable training programmes to support teachers in meeting the specific needs of the groups identified in the strategy document. This need surfaced strongly during the evaluation of the FEFC non-schedule 2 projects and during the recent Basic Skills Quality Initiative training events.

39. The BSA curriculum training events represent a very useful introduction to the new curriculum but will be unlikely to meet the diverse needs of staff trying to address the needs of different kinds of learners, particularly if the teacher is relatively new or inexperienced. The FEFC Basic Skills Quality Initiative training is aimed at strategic and operational managers rather than teaching staff and will not address this issue. We provide more evidence and make a number of practical suggestions about teacher training in Appendix A. Lessons from the evaluation of the non-schedule 2 pilot projects relating to staff recruitment and staff development are identified in Appendix C.

Initial assessment

40. There is a good deal of confusion in the post-16 sector about which screening and diagnostic assessment tools should be used to diagnose basic and key skills needs. The 200 responses to our recent questionnaire[8] on basic skills and key skills revealed that these providers alone used more than 37 tools or pieces of evidence for initial assessment of basic skills. We suggest that the assessment tools currently on offer, and any newcomers to the market, should be evaluated to ensure that they are reliable, robust, easy to use and mapped clearly to the new basic skills standards and key skills specifications. This evaluation should differentiate clearly between tools suitable for screening and those suitable for diagnosis. They are commonly confused.

41. The evaluation of tools should be made available to all providers of basic and key skills. The statement suggests that the new national tests may be suitable screening and/or assessment tools for some learners, but we believe that many people will be put off provision altogether by a test-based assessment tool.

Accommodation

42. The FEFC's *Curriculum area survey*[9] reported a wide variation in the quality of accommodation, including 'classrooms that are in poor condition, with leaking roofs or broken windows'. The survey also reported that 'basic education offered in community locations is mostly of a lower quality than accommodation on college sites'.

43. Increased student numbers will require more accommodation. Better achievement will require better classroom resources, including secure ICT hardware and storage space. We welcome the statement's emphasis on 'lead action across all government departments'. We hope that a coordinated effort across government could enable access to suitable teaching and learning environments in convenient locations, such as LEA and health service accommodation, for the delivery of adult programmes.

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Management of learning

Learning programmes

44. We believe that the key features identified in this paragraph are sound. We would like to see an increased emphasis on embedding literacy, numeracy and ESOL into other kinds of learning to provide flexible, challenging and relevant courses for groups with different needs. As we suggested in paragraph 5, we believe that the strategy should rely on a voluntary rather than coercive approach to bring about a culture of commitment to learning.

45. 'More and different' provision should be the key to the new-style basic skills delivery. There are plentiful examples of good practice in the sector, but dissemination and opportunities to share good practice have been patchy. See Appendix A for suggestions about sharing good practice.

Certification for bite-sized achievement

46. Malcolm Wicks's recent article in the Agency journal *College research* suggests that not all outputs of teaching and learning can be quantified. 'Even if a particular qualification does not produce a relatively strong rate of return, it may be helpful in delivering a more inclusive society. The evidence is that learning has a strong impact on self esteem.'[10]

47. We agree wholeheartedly with the statement that learners need bite-sized goals and accompanying certification. We note from Rob Hull's recent letter regarding the Learning and Skills Act 2000[11] that, 'the government intends to offer units of qualifications to adult learners ... adults quite often want to take small steps towards a qualification and in some cases may want to take units of different qualifications'.

This is particularly important for those who are:

- unable to attend intensively and/or regularly, for example those with mental ill health or other health problems, shift workers, parents of small children, people in hostel accommodation, those studying under the current 16-hour rule and many others
- unable to attend over a prolonged period because they are liable to be 'moved on', for example prisoners, people on probation, army recruits, asylum seekers, refugees, homeless people.

48. However, government policy does not extend this 'bite-sized' approach to 16–19-year-old learners, so accreditation will not be bite-sized for them. The strategy needs to address motivation for these groups, particularly for disaffected young people, who often benefit from adult education approaches.

49. Learners who have problems with attendance and motivation comprise some of the largest groups within the overall basic skills cohort. It will be essential to offer them recognition for the bites of learning they achieve and give them certification which can be built upon – either at a later date with the same provider or in another learning context entirely.

50. There is, therefore, a strong need for high-quality, relevant, unitised awards or the national record of achievement which can act as a halfway house between 'internal accreditation' and national qualifications. These awards or records could include units of qualifications which could be built up as part of a learning portfolio. The portfolio could eventually be presented as evidence towards a national qualification.

51. This system would provide the bridges and ladders to lead people across and up the national qualifications framework. The awards could reward achievement of specific literacy and numeracy skills introduced into other learning programmes such as vocational, leisure and self-development courses. The awards or record would be more than just 'internal certificates', which will continue to be relatively worthless. Will learners want an internal certificate if their basic skills programme took place in a prison?

52. Rigorous internal verification/moderation would ensure that the system is robust and reliable.

53. We hope that progress of this kind can be recorded even though it does not result in a national qualification and also that the resulting data will be collected to provide evidence for achievement towards the national target. A great deal of work will be missed if national qualifications are the only evidence counting towards achievement. This would also distort the nature of provision and compromise delivery techniques, particularly if national tests are incentivised through the new funding methodology.

Progression

54. Success does not necessarily mean progression onto other accredited courses. The strategy statement is entitled *Skills for life*. The ability to function more competently at home or at work is in itself a measure of success. There is a danger that the basic skills strategy becomes distorted by those outcomes which can be most easily measured.

55. The provision of advice and guidance on progression options is an essential feature of a high-quality learning experience and one that we strongly endorse. However, adults may not always want to progress in this way. Certainly, for many adults progression is unlikely to be 'seamless'. They may have clear learning goals which have been achieved. They may want to stop learning for the time being and return to learning much later. This is another important reason for offering recognised awards or a national record which can be used as the basis for subsequent re-entry into education for those who have not achieved national qualifications.

56. We were surprised to see a reference in paragraph 13 to progression from basic skills Level 1 to Key Skills Level 1. Surely now that the standards and tests for basic skills and Key Skills are aligned, progression would normally be from basic skills Level 1 to Key Skills Level 2?

57. We would like to see a complementary strategy statement about learning programmes, accreditation and progression routes for ESOL and for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

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The national tests

58. We agree that qualifications need to be consistent and reliable. We welcome the introduction of universal national tests, which will be highly relevant for some adult learners. We also welcome the requirement for awarding bodies to give centres and candidates feedback on individual progress, and supply certificates which record the candidate's performance in each of the subskills.

59. However, modes of assessment have a significant effect on a student's learning experience. Tests assess a very limited range of outcomes. Multiple choice tests are particularly problematic where a student's achievement has been broad and contextualised to his or her own needs and interests. The recent FEFC report on Entry and Level 1 awards[12] reminds us that: 'the basic skills curriculum is narrow in comparison with the lifelong learning skills curriculum and is in danger of further disenfranchising students, many of whom are already disadvantaged'.

60. We are concerned that the introduction of national tests may further limit the nature of a student's learning experience.

61. For some learners, tests will remind them of failure at school, thereby decreasing confidence and motivation. For these learners, tests must be kept well in the background during the learning programme. For some people, tests may never be the appropriate mode of assessment.

62. So, tests have well-documented limitations. As we describe in the previous paragraphs, there will need to be other ways of certificating the bite-sized and uneven progress often made by adults.

63. Some aspects of the new qualifications for basic skills remain unclear to us.

Listening and speaking

Will a test for listening and speaking be devised? This will be particularly important for learners who do not speak English as their first language. As the FEFC report on Entry and Level 1 awards reminds us, the separation of literacy from oracy runs counter to practice in the national curriculum and to post-16 key skills developments.

Qualifications in one subskill
Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) guidance seems to indicate that numeracy will be tested in its entirety at a level, but that awarding bodies can submit literacy qualifications which test one of the three subskills (speaking and listening, reading or writing). However, the unit titles on offer do not seem to reflect this. We believe that this flexibility will be important for raising participation and achievement levels among adult learners and for the achievement of government targets. There is a danger that, without it, fewer and fewer people will want or be able to achieve qualifications in basic skills: this will act directly against the government's intention to improve performance in this area.

Pass at Entry level
We hope that candidates will be able to achieve a pass in the Entry level qualification even if they have an uneven profile of achievement within each of the subskills (for example, have achieved at Entry 1 for writing, Entry 2 for reading and Entry 3 for listening and speaking).

Unit certification for portfolios
We assume that, if learners submit successful portfolios, this will result in unit certification even if they have not passed the relevant test at Level 1 or Level 2.

External assessment
We hope that 50 per cent of external assessment at Entry level could consist of an internally set and externally marked assignment.

ESOL qualifications
We are concerned about qualifications for ESOL for a number of reasons:

- The titles of the basic skills qualifications are unsuitable for ESOL qualifications and for ESOL learners.
- There is no speaking and listening test at present.
- The awarding bodies, many of which have products which are relevant for both English as a foreign language (EFL) and ESOL students, are faced with three apparently conflicting frameworks in the shape of the basic skills standards, the national language standards and the common European framework. Significant mapping is needed to make sense of the relationship between these frameworks.

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A national curriculum

64. The document makes some assumptions about the speed and ease with which providers will be able to work with the standards and the curriculum. The paragraph also seems to promote the curriculum as a syllabus to be closely followed at each level rather than used as intended – as a flexible tool to deliver individual learning programmes.[13]

65. We would like to see a complementary strategy statement about the ESOL and learning difficulties curriculum documents.

Key skills and basic skills

66. The FEFC report on Entry and Level 1 awards[14] states that: 'College managers report that the current distinction between basic skills and key skills is unhelpful in planning the curriculum and helping students to gain awards.'

67. The findings of Cambridge University's analysis of needs[15] (commissioned by the DfEE-sponsored Key Skills Support Programme, led by this Agency) confirms that there is confusion among practitioners about the distinctiveness of key and basic skills (Learning and Skills Development Agency, 2000).

68. We know that the nationally accepted definitions of basic skills and key skills do not provide a clear distinction between the two areas of work. Recent research[16] reveals that 35 per cent of 200 questionnaire respondents had no working definition of basic skills; 40 per cent had none for key skills; 57 per cent felt that there were issues arising from alignment; and 70 per cent felt that they needed support in this area.

69. We urge the Unit to support educational providers in recognising the relationships between these two important areas of work and making sure that good practice is consolidated and shared.

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New teaching materials

70. We welcome funding to support the production of new teaching materials. However, we believe that the Unit should avoid trying to commission a 'standard' set of materials which will inevitably fail to meet the needs of learners with different specific needs.

71. There are some good materials already in existence, both in the public domain and produced in-house by providers. We suggest that the successful contractor for this work:
    - invites submissions, from a range of sources, of existing materials for different learner groups
    - selects the best materials with the help of expert practitioners
    - maps the selected materials to the levels and competences of the new standards and curriculum, with signposting to the new software packages emerging from learndirect
    - commissions additional materials to fill gaps or to meet the needs of specific priority groups.
72. Materials will need to show evidence of a clear teaching purpose, break down teaching into small steps and distinguish clearly between teaching activities and assessment activities. They should be accompanied by teachers' notes to help teachers use them creatively and effectively.
73. Paragraph 59 suggests that the materials will provide 'pre-assembled programmes'; however, materials are not in themselves learning programmes. They will need to be integrated into a syllabus and scheme of work identified with the learners after initial assessment.
74. We would like to see a complementary strategy statement about learning materials for ESOL and for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. These materials should simultaneously develop ICT skills and basic skills.

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Inspection

75. We agree that robust inspection arrangements are critical to raising standards. The Agency welcomes a full review of the inspection arrangements for literacy, numeracy and ESOL.
76. The FEFC funding methodology's emphasis on retention and achievement, without explanation of circumstances, is sometimes unhelpful for this area of work. Under the government's dispersal policy, for example, asylum seekers are arbitrarily moved from one location to another, with inevitable consequences for providers' retention and achievement data. More specific benchmarks would allow providers to make realistic comparisons which take circumstances into account.
77. The strategy statement makes several references to the proposal that funding will be directed to education providers who are successful in raising standards of achievement, and away from those who are failing to do so. We have already raised doubts about the wisdom of single-mindedly pursuing this approach.
78. We know that there are dangers in tying funding to learner achievement alone, especially if the principal measure of achievement is the national test. If funding incentives are based mainly on achievement of the test, providers may pick off learners who are likely to achieve quickly and exclude the more difficult-to-reach learners who will take longer to achieve.
79. We suggest that a variety of measures are used to evaluate effectiveness and that providers are supported to build capacity over a reasonable period of time.

PAGE 16

Pathfinder projects

80. We hope that the Pathfinder projects help to trial:
    - regional and subregional approaches to achieving coherence in strategic planning
    - the use of surveys to raise awareness among potential learners, identify perceived needs and increase ownership of provision
    - projects that increase capacity in local areas and involve members of the local community in the delivery of programmes
    - building on existing good practice, develop broader approaches to lifelong learning than simply literacy and numeracy.

PAGE 17

Flexible learning and information and communications technology (ICT)

81. As the strategy statement suggests, there is now a great deal of evidence to show that ICT is an effective 'hook' to draw people into literacy and numeracy provision.
82. Although we agree with the BSA[17] that self-help, independent learning materials should be widely available, we are not optimistic that the majority of the 4m people in the higher level group will only require 'limited' teacher support. Many learners find independent learning a struggle, not necessarily because they are not confident readers, but because independent learning requires a great deal of motivation, concentration and perseverance. Many people are more motivated by studying interesting subjects alongside others, led by an effective and supportive teacher.

83. We welcome the inclusion of ICT as a tool in the basic skills strategy. The Ufi centres will make a valuable contribution. However, the basic skills learning packages developed for Ufi are not readily available for use by staff working outside Ufi centres. Thus, for many teachers the range of appropriate ICT-based materials is still limited. There is a lack of software that is suitable for adults and flexible enough to fit into group and individual learning programmes. In addition, many teachers lack the skills required to use ICT effectively within their teaching. This gap needs to be addressed urgently within the new teacher training arrangements.

84. If ICT is to be used effectively within the strategy, we must address not just issues of software design and teacher training, but also the funding implications of hardware purchase, accommodation changes and security/storage arrangements.

85. The new basic skills classroom should incorporate a secure data projector and smartscreen as well as individual computer stations, so that ICT software can be used with the whole group as an interactive stimulus activity. Such classrooms are being designed and built in the post-16 sector, but they are currently being used by high-status areas of the curriculum such as A-level programmes.

86. Accommodation, particularly off-site accommodation, needs to be upgraded to make it possible to use ICT hardware safely. Technical support arrangements for hardware and software are also an issue for smaller providers and those working in outreach contexts.

87. The Unit should ensure that adequate support is available to encourage creativity and expertise in using ICT as a *teaching* tool. Regional basic skills ICT networks could provide training and materials, building on the best current practice in the field. This training could include ICT teachers, as well as literacy and numeracy teachers, because literacy and numeracy skills can be easily integrated into ICT courses.

88. Without this support, there is a danger that ICT will be used as an end in itself, with many teachers never moving beyond asking learners to word process or complete worksheets on screen.

89. However, ICT should not be viewed as the only innovative vehicle for delivery of literacy and numeracy. The significance of leisure in people's lives could be better exploited. Games and fun activities could provide a fruitful basis for literacy and numeracy development.

Next steps

90. The strategy statement sets out an ambitious programme. Many elements of the strategy are interdependent. The definitive strategy document needs to lay out a realistic timetable and action plan, with milestones.

91. A particular priority should be to ensure that the lessons and impact of research and of related initiatives are maximised. As Malcolm Wicks suggests in his recent article: 'policy and practice should be evidence-based. Research must make a major impact on action.'[18]

92. For example, the approach used in the USA in their Equipped for the Future initiative provides a useful model. The process of consultation with learners and providers encouraged understanding and ownership of the opportunities provided. We suggest that this consultative approach should be tested within the Pathfinder projects.

93. Similarly, research also highlights some lessons that may be learnt from the experience of the national literacy and numeracy strategies (NLS and NNS) in schools. The strategies are undoubtedly raising skills levels among children. However, in a survey of over 1400 National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) members in October 2000, 16 per cent of respondents noted that the NNS was 'less prescriptive and more flexible' than the NLS, and 10 per cent commented on the need for a broad and balanced curriculum that enables creativity for both staff and children. This reflects the teachers' view that the NLS has been over-prescriptive. In fact, OFSTED noted in its evaluation of the second year of the NLS that, in practice, modification of the literacy hour has been necessary and should be encouraged.

94. The government needs to commission rigorous quantitative and qualitative research in the area of basic skills. The Learning and Skills Development Agency has been asked by government to help develop a stronger research effort in post-16 learning and skills to create a better evidence base for policy development, and to improve the experience of learners. We have been asked to work with others to develop research capacity and to address the research deficit in key areas. Work-based learning is a particular priority. Basic skills is another. We have begun to work to this agenda, and will be consulting with the Department and other stakeholders to assess key research priorities.

95. We welcome the forthcoming seminars with Malcolm Wicks and the regional meetings chaired by Susan Pember. We hope that many key players – including teachers, providers, regional agencies, funding bodies and specialist staff from the BSA, National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), the Language and Literacy Unit and our own organisation – will share their views to make the strategy work. We believe that wide consultation will lead to fuller debate and create better ownership of the strategy, enabling shared understanding and more effective implementation.

96. We believe that providers, learners and employers have found the various basic skills initiatives incoherent in the past. We fully endorse the statement that 'we will only succeed if we work together'.

Appendices

APPENDIX A
Staff training

1. We suggest:
   - improving the skills of those currently employed in basic skills teaching, by setting up regional practitioner networks (or supporting effective existing networks), with the aim of sharing good practice in teaching and learning, developing effective classroom management techniques, piloting new teaching materials and providing a forum for teachers involved in the Pathfinder projects. Specific ICT networks would also be very useful in disseminating good practice
   - initiating an initial recruitment campaign to identify people who can be rapidly trained to deliver literacy, numeracy and ESOL. Many potential teachers may currently be involved in teaching and training in other areas of the post-16 curriculum or in other sectors, and will therefore have teaching experience. When the new general FE teaching qualifications are developed to cover the teaching of basic skills to a minimum level, there may be opportunities to encourage mainstream teachers from other disciplines to switch to basic skills teaching. For these staff in particular it will be important to design a targeted training programme
   - initiating a recruitment campaign to identify people from different priority groups who can be trained as teachers, mentors and assistants to deliver literacy, numeracy and ESOL within their communities using strategies proven as a result of City Challenge, SRB and other relevant development activities. Training programmes are already taking place in some areas for non-teaching staff who are currently working with the priority groups (for example, youth workers, community workers, health workers and housing staff); using these front-line workers as mentors is a well-proven way of reaching new learners.
   - accelerating the development of the new initial teacher training arrangements for literacy, numeracy and ESOL staff, building on the most successful teacher training models in current practice; this will equip a future pool of staff with specialist skills in teaching these subjects or integrating them into their own specialisms (the date given in the strategy document seems to have been moved back from September 2001 to 2002).

2. Other measures could include:

Audit

- audit of mainstream and key skills teachers' experience and qualifications to identify those with potential who may currently be teaching in other areas.

Career opportunities

- creation of incentives such as financial inducements or a better career ladder, with more fractional and full-time posts to improve retention and reward able teachers
- inclusion of the requirement for key skills/ basic skills teaching skills in all job descriptions
- appointment of basic skills super teachers with remission from the teaching timetable to act as role models, team teachers/mentors, possibly funded by the standards fund for further education
- negotiation with teacher supply agencies to ensure that basic skills and key skills staff receive the same part-time rate as staff employed by the provider
- use of agencies as a filter for future full-time staff.

Staff development

- ring-fenced funding for basic skills development weeks and staff development days along the lines of the old 'Baker days' with paid attendance for part-time teachers
- stipulation that the new arrangements for matched funding from the standards fund for professional development activity include basic skills as a key element
- development of joint training and training/ development staff handbooks for key skills and basic skills teachers
- joint training for ESOL staff and basic skills staff to share good practice, particularly where one set of teachers tends to have more expertise, (for example, ESOL teachers in group teaching and basic skills teachers in delivering individual learning programmes)

- inclusion of key skills awareness in the job description of basic skills teachers, and vice versa
- improved volunteer recruitment and specialist training. 2001 is the International Year of Volunteering; the strategy could set up a well-publicised national initiative to attract volunteers to deliver literacy, numeracy and ESOL alongside trained teachers
- introduction of cross-organisational practitioner working groups to monitor basic skills and key skills practice, then disseminate good practice internally. As well as improving practice, this would build goodwill and improve morale
- introduction of a rolling programme of teacher observations across all kinds of post-16 providers; introduce more peer teaching/review mechanisms
- use of specialists from basic skills, key skills and ESOL teams within organisations as internal consultants to other subject areas to build basic and key skills capacity
- introduction of a formal probationary period for all new teachers, full- and part-time.

3. But curriculum training and other forms of teacher training will not be enough. A particular new kind of teacher will need to be found and trained. The evaluation of non-schedule 2 pilot projects[19] emphasised that, for many learner groups, special teaching skills are required. The non-schedule 2 evaluation stated that 'staff need to have a particular affinity with adult learners and an understanding of the issues the particular group faces'. Students reported that the tutor is crucial to their continuation on the programme, 'the tutor needs to be able to adjust to the group, not the group to them'.[20]

4. The non-schedule 2 projects found that these skills were in short supply in the colleges.

   Several projects reported staffing issues either relating to recruitment of appropriate staff, finding appropriate staff within the current staffing of the college, or the ability of staff to work more flexibly in the community than they had been used to.

   It was especially difficult to find minority ethnic tutors. This needs to be addressed urgently as part of a national awareness raising campaign.

APPENDIX B

PAGES 7–11

Priority groups

PARAGRAPH 14

Young adults in the workforce

1. Basic skills for adults in the workplace is clearly a regeneration and economic development issue as much as a social issue.

2. The key factor in tackling poor basic skills among young adults will be the nature of the education provided for them. Paragraph 17 argues for literacy and numeracy to be integrated into learning programmes for 16–19 year olds such as apprenticeships but then goes on to suggest that those in work who have no training have time off which can be used for 'basic skills courses'. If these young people are to be encouraged to participate in training, courses need to offer skills that will excite and motivate them. This type of provision may succeed where courses that focus on literacy and numeracy will not. This is particularly true for young people who are in low-skilled jobs without access to training.

3. We need to develop strategies and incentives so that employers will positively encourage young people to take up their right to study leave.

4. Mentor schemes would provide some of these young adults with role models of young people with good literacy and numeracy skills, so that these skills can be seen to have a positive effect on earning, etc. Teachers can also be good role models if they come from the learner's community as we suggest in Appendix A, paragraph 1.

5. Modern apprentices need to have specific literacy and numeracy skills to succeed in their apprenticeship and be effective in their chosen field. If the educational provision does not seem relevant, the apprentice is likely to reject it, either explicitly or tacitly.

6. A number of workplace basic skills forums have been set up regionally, with members from providers and regional agencies. These will help to develop the regional strategic focus, for example by ensuring that a good proportion of the regional skills development funds are directed into literacy and numeracy in the workplace.

PARAGRAPH 18

People who live in disadvantaged communities

7. We agree that it is vital to link innovative work in the basic skills arena to existing regeneration programmes in deprived areas. This coherent approach to social regeneration needs to be tackled at intra-governmental level as well as through regional and local planning. Harmonisation of funding streams for basic skills would promote this. Currently, some areas are eligible for funding from a wide range of sources and are consequently the target of numerous and often independent projects while other areas find it difficult to obtain funding to address known needs.

8. It is important that the strategy takes on board the lessons of previous initiatives, such as the non-schedule 2 projects, the Adult and Community Learning Fund projects, the SEU's report *Bridging the gap*, the subsequent study to develop a set of key principles for working with disadvantaged young people (DfEE/LSDA) and FEFC's current Basic Skills in the Community project.

9. The evidence from the non-schedule 2 pilot projects and other initiatives shows that funding mechanisms must:
   - take account of the need for outreach and groundwork
   - offer successful projects continued funding to maximise the benefits of the initial investment.

PARAGRAPH 22

Parents

10. Courses run according to the criteria set out for the standards fund can prove very effective. However, to attract parents who will not identify with these courses or are unable to attend during school hours, providers would welcome funding with less restrictive criteria. Family literacy and numeracy courses can benefit from being linked with, and/or embedded in, broader programmes of family learning and particularly those that interest and motivate fathers.

11. There is research evidence that parents' participation in any form of education, not just family learning, has positive benefits for both parents and children. Other relevant work includes the Campaign for Learning's research into the motivation for developmental learning within the context of the family and BSA/NFER's major study on family learning.[21] There is a need for research and related development projects on:
   - the role of fathers in family learning
   - family learning models that work for the secondary age group.

12. Tests could have a damaging effect on motivation and confidence among this group.

13. Although parents represent an important dimension of the overall family learning focus, we should also bear in mind the need for government to look at the literacy and numeracy needs of older, frail and dependent members of the family.

PARAGRAPH 29

Workers in low-skilled jobs

14. Non-schedule 2 funding this year is supporting work with low-paid employees. Funding is targeted at providers who will set up provision on employers' premises. The evaluation of these projects needs to be taken into account in the development of the strategy in relation to these groups.

Motivation

15. We need to acknowledge that motivation may be the biggest hurdle to getting involved in basic skills learning. The proposals seem to hint that the strategy may provide 'more of the same', in other words a type of provision which has already been rejected. A feature of adulthood is the ability to reject what is not useful and enjoyable, and the concept of voluntarism in participation must not be lost.

16. The key to active and willing involvement in basic skills development is usually an individual's ambitions in his or her life and work (for example, a better job with more money). The relevance of the educational provision to the achievement of these aspirations will be an important incentive.

Securing employer involvement

17. Engaging the support of employers in developing the basic skills of their employees is critical. This needs to be linked to employers' perceptions of the benefits that staff with good basic skills will bring to their business. Conviction about these benefits will be a powerful lever for persuading employers to contribute to their employees' training in basic skills, providing the relevance to business success is transparent and the training does not interfere with the day-to-day working of the firm.

18. Many employers in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are aware of the need to develop the basic skills of their workforce and are prepared to support training. However, some employers are not convinced that staff with good basic skills will make their business more successful; some employers are unaware of their responsibility for developing their employees' skills.

19. Many small businesses are run and staffed by people with high-level skills, who do not need to develop their basic skills. Careful segmenting in the marketing of basic skills provision is required to ensure that relevant employers are reached.

20. More investigation should be undertaken to identify the needs of people employed on a contract or agency basis. They may have basic skills needs and work within small firms, but fall outside the 'employed' cohort. The volume of individuals with basic skills needs is likely to be low in one-person firms.

21. Strategies need to be considered for grouping employers to share costs and resources. FEDA research[22] found evidence of some willingness to share training rooms and resources. As well as reducing costs, this could increase ownership of a local basic skills initiative. The research also found that levels of knowledge about basic skills as a workplace issue were very high among employers, and some were taking steps to help employees with basic skills problems. Employers were supportive of employees with basic skills needs but recognised that it was an issue requiring a sensitive approach. Employers were concerned that poor literacy and numeracy were a barrier to self-advancement and further training, in addition to causing daily workplace difficulties.

22. The desire to progress to a better job with a new employer or to gain promotion was expressed by many existing basic skills learners in our research. Provision for employed learners needs to fit around other aspects of their lives. The main disadvantages of current provision are seen to be travel time to college and fitting in learning with shift work, pointing to the need for provision located at or near the workplace.

23. Once adults begin to engage in learning, their commitment levels can be very high. While most learners interviewed in our survey were receiving time off work, employed learners indicated they would be prepared to continue without time off. Most of those interviewed have their fees paid by their employer, or receive free tuition. However, all indicated they would be willing to pay some or all of their course fees. Linking basic skills training to the demands of the job motivates learners, who see the benefits in terms of better jobs or promotion. Working in a group at college was the most popular option for learning among those surveyed. This can conflict with employers' preference for training based at their premises.

Priorities for development

24. There is a need to identify and describe a flexible range of basic skills for the workplace services to be marketed to employers/ees.

25. A prestigious basic skills at work service should be launched, which emphasises the business case for such learning. It may be useful to have a distinctive brand image for this provision, common across all providers, which emphasises the benefits of basic skills in a work context.

Materials

26. Rather than developing a limited bank of general resources, examples of customised materials relating to work contexts would be helpful. Consideration should be given to a standardised format, or shell, for materials. Staff also need to develop their capacity to undertake rapid modifications of core material.

Links to demands of the workplace

27. The relevance of learning to the demands of the job must be clear to learners and their employees. This may also resolve possible conflict of interests between employers and their employees. It will also have implications for contextualising learning materials and using real examples of the literacy or numeracy materials in the workplace. Providers will need to demonstrate their understanding of the particular business context, which will take time.

Flexible delivery

28. Delivery of learning will need to accommodate the demands of the workplace. A range of learning delivery methods should be available, with the capacity to build individual programmes to meet a learner's unique set of circumstances. Worksheets or exercises that could be used by learners during the course of their work would be helpful, not just for reinforcing learning, but for securing matched resources from employers.

29. Delivery methods which overcome the constraints of 'learning while earning' must be developed. This will involve attention to internal provider working practices, as well as the demands of the learners' workplaces. Developing networks of firms who could work together and share resources should also be considered.

Location and accommodation

30. The possibility of using shared learning centres should be explored. Consideration should be given to grouping SMEs for training purposes.

Raising awareness

31. Although raising awareness is an ongoing process, particular attention must be paid to this aspect at the outset of a basic skills initiative. The general capacity to provide basic skills programmes *customised* to the needs of the workplace should be promoted, with relevant case studies to show what can be achieved.

    To be successful, an awareness-raising campaign will need to:

    - segment the market:
      - targeting by size of firm
      - excluding those firms that are high tech or wholly 'professional'
      - sector focus
    - enlist the support of a range of agencies to access mailing lists, networks, etc:
      - Business Links and the new small Business Support Service
      - national training organisations (NTOs)
      - trade unions and the TUC
      - BSA
      - Workplace Basic Skills Training Network
    - identify relevant resources:
      - determine the range of promotional activities to be used in the initial awareness-raising phase and commission appropriate publicity material to emphasise the benefits to the employer/ee
    - link with national initiatives:
      - learning at work days
      - International Year of Reading
      - maths campaigns
    - ensure that all providers are aware of the initiative to ensure they:
      - respond appropriately to enquiries
      - channel potential beneficiaries in the right direction
    - provide guidance/diagnostic assessment services and training needs analysis:
      - although the links to Connexions are critical, many providers are likely to have strengths in this area already. The service will need to be developed to meet the particular needs of the identified client groups.

Capacity

32. The key partners identified in this section will be dependent on existing providers of basic skills to deliver learning opportunities. There will need to be a significant increase in capacity which will require specialist training to ensure that sufficient numbers of staff are prepared for work in this environment.

33. Basic skills in the workplace must link with the skills development plans and the skills development funds of RDAs. There are currently a number of regional basic skills forums (some specifically for workplace basic skills). Members include providers, local government, TUC staff and representatives of a range of national and regional agencies. Such forums could usefully play a strategic role (for example, by helping to direct skills development funds to literacy and numeracy in the workplace).

PARAGRAPH 31
Unemployed people

34. A report on the BBC News website following Gordon Brown's statement on 6 January 2001 suggested that compulsory reading and writing tests would be introduced for anyone unemployed for over six months. The article reported that benefits could be cut if claimants refused the tests. Although this scheme would raise awareness of literacy and numeracy weaknesses, if it were to be tied to compulsory attendance on basic skills programmes, the effects would be intensely demotivating for both learners and teachers.

35. We welcome the statement's emphasis on quality in the screening, assessment and teaching processes for the unemployed and the recognition of the need for a wide range of solutions to be available to ensure individual needs are met.

36. However, Gordon Brown was quoted as promising a 'huge increase' in training to help boost the skills of those who fell short. We see no evidence of this capacity in the sector at the present time, particularly in the field of numeracy and ICT training. Teachers take around two years to train to the level we are expecting of them. There is a danger that if large numbers of unemployed people sign up, willingly or unwillingly, to take the training programmes, there simply may not be sufficient provision to accommodate them.

37. We are particularly pleased to note the intention to explore ways of enabling those with literacy and numeracy needs, who are claiming jobseeker's allowance, to have time spent studying literacy and numeracy discounted for the purpose of the 16-hour rule. The rule has had a severely negative effect on both learners and providers.

38. We welcome early screening and incentives to encourage participation and achievement on basic skills courses for unemployed people with low-level skills. However, many unemployed people already have experience of courses in literacy and numeracy and are reluctant to take up further learning opportunities of this type. Rather than making courses in literacy and numeracy a *prerequisite* for progress to more motivating courses such as ICT or vocational skills, these more attractive courses should be designed to be accessible to all clients and include basic skills support for those who require it.

39. Currently, assessment of basic skills needs under the New Deal is more detailed than that undertaken at the six-month Restart interview. Under New Deal, provision will be made available to those assessed at Level 1 and below rather than Entry level or below. The personal adviser will be expected to work more closely with the client and reviews will include a representative from the provider delivering the basic skills programme. We suggest that programmes need to be more intensive and longer than at present: 2–4 weeks is too short for the learner to demonstrate improvement and achievement.

PARAGRAPH 36

Benefit claimants

40. We welcome the intention to support lone parents of school-age children on appropriate basic skills provision. Planning will be necessary to ensure that suitable local, community-based provision has the capacity to respond to such additional demands.

PARAGRAPH 40

Groups at high risk of social exclusion

Homeless people

41. The Agency and the Big Issue Foundation have recently concluded a two-year project, supported by the Adult and Community Learning Fund (ACLF), which investigated effective models for improving the life chances of homeless people. The project targeted *Big Issue* vendors and other adults over 25. The project has identified the most effective ways of reaching, supporting and referring this important group of potential learners. The project offered an incentive of £5 per day of attendance as income replacement to encourage participation. Enrolment exceeded expectations and some participants have gained qualifications. Partnership arrangements have also proved successful. The strategies explored in this project may be useful to the Pathfinder projects.

ESOL

42. We welcome the invitation to make recommendations for those who do not speak English as their first language. However, the strategy for addressing their needs will need to be radically different from that designed for people with literacy and numeracy needs. We suggest that a parallel ESOL statement is published for consultation.

PARAGRAPH 44

Government employees

43. We welcome the suggestion that the government offers support to its employees with poor literacy and numeracy. We suggest that this initiative extends into other areas of large-scale employment, such as colleges, national agencies and hospitals.

Learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

44. Learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are a diverse group with a wide range of abilities and needs. There is now an entitlement to inclusive learning for all learners and ongoing investment in training to ensure that staff are aware of and able to meet the needs of all learners.

45. The basic skills strategy should address the needs of all learners, but in the statement little attention seems to have been paid to the requirements of people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There is no direct reference to *Freedom to learn*[23] or to inclusive learning.

46. The SEN and Disability Rights in Education Bill is due to become law in this session of parliament. It states that it will be unlawful to treat someone with a learning difficulty or disability less favourably than other, non-disabled people. All institutions will also be required to make reasonable adjustments to meet their requirements. This has clear implications for the delivery and assessment of the basic skills curriculum, and the basic skills strategy as a whole.

47. The strategy will need to be formulated to include the learning needs of disabled people at every stage and in all documentation. It will be necessary to ensure that curriculum guidance to all providers indicates what they must do to meet the requirements of the Act. The approach will need to be inclusive and embedded, rather than add-on or separate, as it is at present. All providers can expect to have learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and, as long as these learners meet the entry requirements of the programme, it will be up to the provider to make the necessary adjustments.

48. 'The challenge for the 21st century is to ensure that all learners can gain access to appropriate learning opportunities in basic skills. There is now an entitlement to lifelong learning which will enable learners to acquire new skills and maintain those already learned.'[24] The Unit will need to help ensure that providers of basic skills education offer learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities opportunities comparable to all other learners.

49. Work has been commissioned to meet the specific needs of adult learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities identified in the *Freedom to learn* report. This programme has already started to build a firm foundation for work with these learners, but we suggest that a parallel strategy will be required. There will be a need for:

- continuing regional support and training networks, bringing together staff who work in different learning contexts to identify and disseminate good practice
- further development of relevant and appropriate materials
- active support for collaborative work across all service providers
- support for the full implementation of the pre-Entry level curriculum.

Army recruits

50. The army has thousands of recruits, many dependants and many civilian workers such as cleaners, catering staff and administrative staff. Though the army reflects a cross-section of society, it contains concentrated pockets of individuals who have often had bad experiences of education and who have joined the army as an alternative to education and training. A high percentage of recruits have pre-Entry or Entry level basic skills needs and a large percentage are dyslexic and require additional support in order to achieve.

51. Providing for these potential learners is an opportunity to meet the needs of a large number of people who are all working for the same employer and can be guided towards achieving basic skills and other education/training qualifications.

52. All soldiers in the infantry are assessed; many are identified as having basic skills needs. There would need to be a directive from the highest level – filtered down through the command structure – to ensure that all those identified as having basic skills needs are provided with appropriate support. This training could be based on the job role of the recruits, with ILT used as a 'carrot' to encourage learning.

53. Staff would need to be trained to deal with the specific requirements of the army context, building on existing examples of good practice such as the work being carried out by Darlington College on the Catterick campus.

54. In this context, the Unit has a particularly good opportunity to implement its intention to influence all areas of government and help a very large number of people improve their literacy, numeracy and other skills.

APPENDIX C

Non-schedule 2 evaluation

Providers

1. Evidence from the evaluation of the FEFC's recent non-schedule 2 projects suggests that the learning curve for providers who are new to working with priority groups can be very steep. 'The greatest challenges to those who were new to the approach have been the amount of time it has taken to set up the learning programmes ... handling the wide range of practical tasks ... and running programmes for new and sometimes challenging learners in community settings'.[25]

Distinctive features of non-schedule 2 programme delivery

2. Managers' views:
   - 62 per cent said 'curriculum content is more flexible/less prescribed'
   - 60 per cent said 'the management of outreach work is more demanding'
   - 57 per cent said 'recruitment of learners is more time-consuming/demands specialist skills'.
3. The first questionnaire asked respondents about the particular challenges in getting the non-schedule 2 programmes running. Out of 319 cases in the projects, 24 reported staffing issues relating to recruitment of appropriate staff, finding appropriate staff within the current staffing of the college, or the ability of staff to operate with more flexibility in the community than they had been used to.
4. It is clear from case study visits that staff need to have a particular affinity with adult learners and an awareness of the issues this particular group face. Many projects used the expertise of partners both to recruit students and to provide tutors and support workers.
5. When project coordinators were asked about what they would do differently next time, three responded that careful selection of teaching staff would be a high priority and 17 managers said the impact on staffing was one of the three most significant areas. This particularly applied to looking for staff with specific experience (12 managers) and employment of bilingual tutors (three managers).

Project management

6. Case study evidence shows that projects clearly benefited when senior and experienced staff managed them with good access into all departments of the college. They also benefited when they had a champion in either the principal or in a member of the senior management team.
7. Skills in outreach and community work are essential. In some instances the project coordinator had these skills. Where this was not the case then the employment of outreach workers or community liaison staff proved worth its weight in gold. Non-schedule 2 has been an opportunity for many colleges to create a completely different relationship with agencies in their communities. It has proved important to be able to allocate sufficient staff time of the right calibre to creating and cementing these relationships.

Recruitment of staff

8. From the case study visits it was made very clear that recruiting the right kind of staff to teach on the projects had been a major issue. Many colleges were very specific in their recruitment and had found it hard to find the right staff for their projects. Finding minority ethnic tutors has been extraordinarily difficult. In one project a black outreach development worker successfully found potential minority ethnic tutors from within community groups who were then accredited by the college and offered training.
9. The staff skills and qualities sought were flexibility, resourcefulness, good interpersonal skills and an ability to relate well to the target group. Staff need good technical subject expertise, experience and confidence with a range of different teaching techniques, a good understanding of group dynamics and how a tutor can influence them, as well as an ability to be at ease with the client group. Where classes observed lacked challenge or shape it was most often due to inexperience on the part of the tutor, a misjudgement of the level at which the learners were capable of working or a lack of variety in pace and activity.

10. Case study evidence reported that many teaching staff were part-time, sessional or agency tutors; they were often recruited at short notice. It is important for the continuity of the projects for managers to be aware of the impact of running an important programme in the community with part-time and agency staff. While many of these staff offer expertise which is vital to the delivery of the programmes, they will also, by definition, be less stable in their employment; a high turnover of staff can lead to difficulties in managing and delivering these demanding programmes.

Non-teaching staff

11. Staffing issues were not confined to teaching staff. Case study evidence shows that many projects had originally underestimated the level of administrative support that would be required and several had made additional administrative appointments during the year to ease the burden on the project coordinators. Such support is essential if coordinators and outreach workers are not to become bogged down with paperwork when they should be networking and setting up or supporting provision.

Staff development and support

12. Despite the unusual and often challenging nature of the work, the case study team found there were few examples of staff having been offered structured support, staff meetings or relevant professional development and training. This may have been a consequence of the priority given to getting the project off the ground or it may have been due to the short-term nature of the employment. Several colleges involved in the pilot projects only used agency staff and therefore did not consider themselves responsible for their professional development. Those colleges that employed staff directly selected tutors who they thought already had the skills required to do the work.

13. Respondents were asked what they had done to prepare and induct staff to work on the non-schedule 2 programme. There were 263 responses to this question: 29 per cent reported internal training had been given; 20 per cent reported that information had been provided on the programmes and learners; 8 per cent of respondents reported that there was access to specialist training when it was required.

14. Case study work and responses from learners give evidence that the appropriateness of the tutors is crucial in working with the disadvantaged, 'fragile' learners. There is a significant expertise and experience in the adult education field, in adult education colleges, the WEA, LEAs, voluntary and community groups. Where projects have worked best there has been a strong partnership between the lead FE college and the other education providers and the colleges have benefited from that experience. FE staff have not had the same background and experience in outreach and community learning and therefore have found it harder to adapt and develop appropriate programmes. However, many colleges were aware of this and did actively seek to address the issue by working in partnership with others who have developed the expertise.

Notes

1. Mager C, Robinson P et al. FEDA, 2000. This is a series of papers arising from a programme of work undertaken by FEDA and the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) to analyse the proposals of the White Paper, *Learning to succeed*, and to consider options for the operation of the new sector.
2. *Quality and standards in further education* 1999–2000. FEFC, October 2000.
3. Taylor S. *Back on track: successful learning provision for disaffected young people*. Learning and Skills Development Agency, December 2000.
4. Greenwood M, Merton A and S Taylor *An evaluation of non-schedule 2 pilot projects*. Learning and Skills Development Agency/NIACE, December 2000.
5. Response of the Basic Skills Agency to the DfEE statement *Skills for life*. January 2001.
6. Learning and Skills Development Agency, December 2000.
7. FEFC. *Curriculum area survey report: basic education*. FEFC, April 1998.
8. *Basic skills and key skills: what's the relationship?* Learning and Skills Development Agency/BSA, due to be published Spring 2001.
9. FEFC, 1998.
10. Wicks M. Reforming the way research interacts with policy: improving the rates of return. *College Research*, Winter 2000.
11. 'Principles for the approval in England of external qualifications for persons aged 19 and over'. Letter from Rob Hull. December, 2000.
12. FEFC. *Numeracy, literacy and ESOL: evaluation of Entry and Level 1 awards*. FEFC, 1999.
13. '...it enables teachers to meet the individual needs of adults through the selection and teaching of skills appropriate to that adult's needs'. Draft curriculum, BSA 2000.
14. FEFC. *Numeracy, Literacy and ESOL: evaluation of Entry and Level 1 awards*. FEFC, 1999.
15. West M, Dee L et al. *Key skills – implementation needs in schools and colleges*. School of Education, University of Cambridge. March, 2000. Research report published by the Learning and Skills Development Agency.
16. *Basic skills and key skills: what's the relationship?* Learning and Skills Development Agency/BSA, due to be published Spring 2001.
17. Response of the Basic Skills Agency to the DfEE statement *Skills for life*. January 2001.
18. Wicks M. Reforming the way research interacts with policy: improving the rates of return. *College Research*, Winter 2000.
19. Greenwood M, Merton A and S Taylor *An evaluation of non-schedule 2 pilot projects*. Learning and Skills Development Agency/NIACE, December 2000.
20. NW regional conference 'The voice of the learner: a celebration of learning'. FEDA/NIACE, June 2000.
21. Brooks G. *Family literacy works: the NFER evaluation of the Basic Skills Agency demonstration programmes*. Basic Skills Agency 1996.
22. Project CRM164A investigated employer perceptions of basic skills in the workforce.
23. *Freedom to learn*. The report of the working group looking into the basic skills needs of adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. DfEE, May 2000.
24. 'Principles for the approval in England of external qualifications for persons aged 19 and over'. Letter from Rob Hull. December, 2000.
25. Greenwood M, Merton A and S Taylor *An evaluation of non-schedule 2 pilot projects*. Learning and Skills Development Agency/NIACE, December 2000.

The Learning and Skills Development Agency welcomes the introduction of a coherent national funding and delivery strategy for adult literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages. This report is the Agency's response to the strategy statement issued by the Basic Skills Strategy Unit. The Agency believes that wide consultation will lead to fuller debate and create better ownership of the strategy, enabling shared understanding and more effective implementation.

The Agency stresses that literacy and numeracy students should be treated as adult customers rather than as victims of their circumstances; potential learners must be able to identify the skills they need and wish to develop themselves. To this end, the Agency outlines research requirements to find out what motivates adults to learn and participate in vocational and self-development programmes. The Agency addresses the issues of service provision, taking into account current teacher shortages but highlighting the potential for local people to become instrumental in the development of their own communities.

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